

RIVERWATCH

The Official Newsletter of POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER® NETWORK

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PAGE 2

LETTER FROM THE
PRESIDENT

PAGE 3

25 YEARS DEFENDING THE
POTOMAC WATERSHED

PAGE 4

25 YEARS DEFENDING
THE UPPER POTOMAC

PAGE 5

25 YEARS DEFENDING THE
SHENANDOAH

PAGE 6

LEGISLATIVE UPDATES
IN MD & VA

MUSSEL RESTORATION

PAGE 7

OUR DEVELOPMENT TEAM
THANKS YOU!



CELEBRATING
25
YEARS OF
MAKING
WAVES

That's 25 years of protecting and defending your right to clean water! It's been a great ride with you and we look forward to 25 more!



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Nancy Stoner, Ed Merrifield, Jeff Kelble — our rocks

A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Celebrating 25 Years of Making Waves

Twenty-five years ago, a small group of passionate advocates came together around a simple idea – our rivers need to be clean and protected. They saw that the Potomac needed a strong voice to stand up against pollution and those who threaten the health of the river and the communities who depend on it. From that vision, Potomac Riverkeeper was formed. As our work grew to defend the Shenandoah and Upper Potomac as well, our name changed to Potomac Riverkeeper Network to reflect our shared mission to fight for clean water across the entire watershed.

Today, Potomac Riverkeeper Network boasts three of the most experienced riverkeepers of any organization in America; their work is supported by a team of dedicated staff who use science and technology to assess water quality, engage communities to grow membership, recruit and train volunteers, and enforce clean water laws to protect our waterways. And we have an even greater number of volunteers without whom what we do would simply not be possible.

We are also supported and guided by a Board of Directors, who – unlike many other organizations’ boards – take an active role in what and how we do what we do, and bring decades of diverse skills and expertise.

As your new President, I am deeply proud – and genuinely humbled – to lead this incredible team. I have spent nearly my entire career fighting

for clean water and I know that my passion is matched step for step and breath for breath by those with whom I work every day.

In these pages, you will read of some of our successes. As you reflect on them, think of them also as our – and your – dreams. Day by day, year by year, we all march to a future of clean water, accessible for all for all purposes. Continue to be a part of this and help us see that dream grow even more real in the next 25 years.



New PRKN president, Betsy Nicholas, enjoying a day with fellow river advocates

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Potomac Riverkeeper Network is a proud member of both EarthShare Mid-Atlantic and Combined Federal Campaign (CFC). Employees can choose to designate a portion of their paycheck to Potomac Riverkeeper Network. Our EarthShare and our CFC number are the same – #87828.

POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER®

25 YEARS OF MAKING WAVES — PROTECTING AND DEFENDING THE POTOMAC WATERSHED



Celebrating the coal ash legislative victory

This timeline tells the story of Potomac Riverkeeper. As you review this, think of how it all began: sort of a kitchen table idea which grew to the powerhouse we are today.

Some of the milestones? Defeating Dominion in the fight over coal ash pollution; taking on the Navy over ordnance testing and the harm caused to habitat and aquatic life; and bringing Alexandria to task for its decades-long coal tar residue leaking in recreational areas.

The list goes on with many other achievements, while arguably less contentious, still vitally important, such as Alexandria working with Richmond and us to achieve an incredibly ambitious reduction in combined sewage overflows through the construction of a purpose built tunnel.

PRKN also started a community scientist water quality monitoring program which is the envy of the clean water movement. With those results, we began the Swimmable Potomac campaign to make the river accessible to all communities and to lift the unnecessary ban on swimming in DC waters.

We also implemented a Trash Free Potomac campaign, as well as a campaign to reduce plastics in the environment.

Never resting, we are at the forefront of efforts to identify sources of PFAS pollution and more importantly, to control and restrict their use.

On to the next 25 years!

A TIMELINE OF POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER SUCCESSES ACHIEVED THROUGH LOTS OF HARD WORK AND ALL YOUR HELP.

The Early Years – 2000 to 2010

- Potomac Riverkeeper Inc. formed by clean water advocates
- Ed Merrifield becomes first Potomac Riverkeeper: “Building an organization from the ground up as the sole employee is not for the faint of heart”
- Potomac Riverkeeper responds to massive fish kill on Potomac: joins Fish Kill Task Force
- Potomac Riverkeeper called to investigate intersex fish: testifies before Congressional Committee
- Potomac Riverkeeper wins first legal battle: Maryland agrees to clean up lead contamination from shooting range in Seneca Creek after a four-year battle
- Shenandoah Riverkeeper Appointed
- Upper Potomac Riverkeeper Appointed

The Next Ten Years – 2011 to 2020, A Robust Adolescence

- Potomac Riverkeeper launches campaign to end toxic coal ash pollution: files Notice of Intent to sue Dominion Resources for Clean Water Act violations – discharges of heavy metal contamination from coal ash ponds into both groundwater and Quantico Creek
- Dean Naujoks becomes Potomac Riverkeeper
- PRKN stops pollution from WSSC: Washington Suburban Sanitary

- Commission signs consent decree agreeing to eliminate discharge of more than 2 million pounds of sediment, aluminum, and other pollutants
- PRKN challenges inadequate public health standards for swimming
- PRKN lawsuit challenges EPA’s approval of weak DC sewage bacteria limits; results in strengthened protections
- PRKN posts first legislative victory: Bipartisan legislation requires Alexandria to virtually eliminate its dumping of 140 million gallons of untreated sewage into the Potomac
- PRKN implements water quality monitoring program: water samples are collected, tested for bacteria at its onboard lab on Sea Dog, its donated research vessel
- PRKN launches Swimmable Potomac Campaign: goal to provide safe swimmable access to all communities
- PRKN notches legislative win battle to stop toxic coal ash pollution: Virginia requires safe disposal of 28 million tons of toxic coal ash from pits leaking into Potomac River

Adulthood – 2020 to 2025, PRKN Continues the Clean Water Fight

- PRKN launches 50 Million Mussels Project: restoration of mussels, which remove nutrients and toxins, filtering out sediments and improving water quality

- PRKN celebrates 50th Anniversary of Clean Water Act
- PRKN begins “Swimmable Potomac” campaign to end DC swim ban
- DC commits to lifting ban on swimming in the Potomac: agrees to lift its decades-old ban on swimming in the Potomac
- PRKN sues City of Alexandria over Coal Tar Residue Pollution
- PRKN sues Navy over Unpermitted Naval Ordnance in the Potomac
- PRKN scores major legislative victory in Maryland: passage of Clean Water Justice Act paves the way for citizen involvement in protecting clean water
- Federal Court Approves Settlement Requiring Navy to Obtain Clean Water Permit: over 100 years of ordnance pollution finally to be regulated
- Federal Court Approves Settlement in Litigation Against City of Alexandria: remediation Coal Tar Residue source and mussel restoration funded
- PRKN and St. Mary’s County, MD Wastewater Treatment Authorities Reach Settlement over Raw Sewage Discharges
- Alexandria Completes Sewage Tunnel: Tunnel integrates wastewater plant with all four of Alexandria’s combined sewer outfalls.

UPPER POTOMAC RIVERKEEPER®

25 YEARS OF MAKING WAVES — PROTECTING AND DEFENDING THE UPPER POTOMAC



Drone Keepers

Undertaking an additional role this year as PRKN's Program Director reflects Upper Potomac Riverkeeper Brent Walls's increased scope of work. As he devotes even more time to the serious issue of PFAS – toxic “forever” chemicals – and how to assess, regulate, and remove them, his days get longer.

Brent has already vastly increased the water quality monitoring in his watershed. This year, PRKN achieved a milestone: our WQM program has been approved as Tier III by the Maryland Department of the Environment and the Chesapeake Monitoring Collaborative. Is there a higher level of approval? Nope. This recognition demonstrates the rigor our water quality monitoring program has – from the training of volunteers, to the protocols for collection and testing, and to the lab on the Sea Dog itself.

Brent has always been a strong advocate for the use of technology in his work. Readers of these pages have long been aware of the groundbreaking work he has done with drones for investigation – frequently, he has been able to gather evidence from the air that would have been impossible on the ground. This year, Brent was also instrumental in placing a Xylem sensor near Williamsport on the Upper Potomac. This will enable him to gather critical water quality data all day, every day; the presence of the sensor frees Brent and his volunteers from testing at that site for testing at others.

MILESTONES IN PROTECTING AND DEFENDING THE UPPER POTOMAC A Timeline of Upper Potomac Riverkeeper Successes

The Early Years – 2000 to 2010

- Potomac Riverkeeper Inc. formed by clean water advocates
- Committed clean water advocates form Potomac Riverkeeper Inc. to be a strong, local advocate for the Potomac River
- Brent Walls begins as Upper Potomac Riverkeeper

The Adolescent Years – 2011 to 2020, Upper Potomac Riverkeeper Shows Its Bright Future

- North Mountain Shale Quarry in Berkeley Springs, WV – First pro bono legal representation to stop shale quarry – successfully imposed restrictions
- Deer Trailer Park in Hagerstown – Negotiated an agreement to build community septic system
- Potomac Pipeline – Brent shows his gift for creating coalitions to oppose an unnecessary gas pipeline under the Potomac River
- Specialty Granules quarry in Adams County, PA – Brent uses drone photos

to demonstrate pollution; enforcement effort results in groundbreaking remediation and preventative measures

- D & L Coal Company in West VA – Upper Potomac Riverkeeper sues to stop illegal stormwater discharges with coal waste and other permit violations; obtained the company's agreement to remove all coal and equipment and halt all operations.
- Verso Corporation – owner of the now-closed Luke, Maryland paper mill, sued for ongoing unlawful discharges of a toxic waste called “black liquor” into the North Branch of the Upper Potomac River. Brent teams with State of Maryland to force agreement to protect the river.

Adulthood – 2020 to 2025, Upper Potomac Riverkeeper Grows into Fighting Force

- Acid Mine Drainage
- First PFAS testing – Brent conducts first analysis for PFAS in Antietam Creek and finds disturbing results

- George Taylor Act – Through Brent's advocacy, Maryland passed the “George Taylor Act” which created restrictions on the sale of certain products containing PFAS
- Drone utilization – Upper Potomac Riverkeeper dramatically expands the use of drones for investigations, leading to enforcement. Becomes the guru of the technology for the entire Waterkeeper Alliance
- Bacterial Water Monitoring – Brent's knowledge of hydrology helped him initiate this testing program to identify sources and solutions for E.Coli bacteria contamination in his watershed – a campaign which expands every year
- Clean Water Justice Act – this legislation in Maryland, which Brent passionately encouraged, enables Maryland residents to become protectors of clean water in their communities



Brent Walls patrolling on the Upper Potomac



Brent's testimony on the dangers of PFAS moves legislators

SHENANDOAH RIVERKEEPER®

25 YEARS OF PROTECTING AND DEFENDING THE BEAUTIFUL SHENANDOAH RIVER AND ITS WATERSHED



Advocating directly to solve problems

Few locations in America are as vibrant and beautiful as the Shenandoah Valley - Thomas Jefferson called it perhaps one of the most stupendous scenes in Nature. What was true then is equally true today.

And preserving it has proved to be a superhuman task. Challenges to the River range from fish kills caused by harmful algal blooms, which are in considerable measure the result of poor farming practices, to the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, which we were instrumental in stopping. Day to day, the disparate goals of different constituencies in the Valley require thoughtful coalition building, which Mark Frondorf, Shenandoah Riverkeeper, is achieving through his Respect the Shenandoah campaign and the Shenandoah Watershed Compact.

Mark keenly understands the importance of cooperation and compromise, so he is a well known figure in the legislative halls in Richmond. His easy going but clear minded approach has enabled him to obtain funding for an array of projects to help the farming community pay for better agricultural management practices and to give him a legislatively mandated position on the Stakeholder Advisory Committee, which works to advise the leadership of the Chesapeake Bay Program by representing the residents and stakeholders of the watershed.

The hard work certainly yields dividends: paddling, fishing, and increased river access - thanks to Mark - make the Valley a great place to recreate, and to live.

A TIMELINE OF SHENANDOAH RIVERKEEPER SUCCESSES ACHIEVED THROUGH LOTS OF HARD WORK AND ALL YOUR HELP.

The Early Years - 2000 to 2010

- Potomac Riverkeeper Inc. formed by clean water advocates - Committed clean water advocates form Potomac Riverkeeper Inc. to be a strong, local advocate for the Potomac River
- Responds to massive fish kill on Potomac - Major Shenandoah fish kill triggers long-term algae work; state forms Fish Kill Task Force.
- Shenandoah Riverkeeper called to investigate intersex fish - Useful testimony given to Congressional Committee on the intersex fish problem in the Potomac River
- Alan Lehman becomes Shenandoah Agriculture Project Manager

The Middle Years - 2011 to 2020

- Mark Frondorf becomes Shenandoah Riverkeeper
- Shenandoah Riverkeeper begins legal action to list the Shenandoah as impaired for algae - Lawsuit against EPA
- Major settlement in case, supported by Shenandoah Riverkeeper against DuPont Chemicals establishes long-term environmental fund
- Tightens limits on Massanutten Wastewater Treatment Plant discharges
- Implements Cattle Exclusion Campaign to reduce direct livestock access to the Shenandoah; farm-by-farm fencing progress documented

- Wins a Chesapeake Bay Trust grant to build a collaborative "Green & Prosperous Valley" forum to cut runoff and support agriculture businesses
- Establishes the monitoring/volunteer program under the "Swim Guide" platform (starting in ~2012) for the Shenandoah watershed, enabling citizen science reporting of pollution and water-quality issues.

The Mature Years - 2021 to 2025, An Effective But Delicate Balance

- Cattle Exclusion Campaign reduces the number of cattle herds directly accessing the Shenandoah River system from about 80 herds down to single digits.
- Celebrates 50th Anniversary of Clean Water Act - 50 years of protection for waterways in US under the federal Clean Water Act
- Successfully lobbied and helped secure legislation in Virginia requiring that cattle herds be removed from rivers and perennial streams by end of 2025
- Filed comments and advocacy on Virginia's Poultry Manure and Litter General Permit in order to reduce nutrient/land-application impacts on the watershed
- Actively supported adoption of "chlorophyll A" water-quality standards and urged the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to adopt additional standards for harmful cyanobacteria in the watershed

- Establishes rapid response -monitoring and involvement in erosion and sediment control issues
- Shenandoah Riverkeeper among coalition to kill Atlantic Coast Pipeline
- Creates Respect the Shenandoah Campaign and Shenandoah Watershed Compact to bring together stakeholders, provide forum and platform for all constituencies and communities to participate in Shenandoah River issues
- Works to impose numeric nutrient limits for Shenandoah River and tributaries
- Algae Elimination Campaign continues after harmful algal bloom advisories issued
- Establishes Trash Free Shenandoah Campaign - scores of annual cleanups with broad community involvement and support
- Works with Xylem Corporation to place floating sensors to test water quality all day, every day
- Actively supported efforts to obtain General Assembly full funding for cost-share for agriculture Best Management Practices
- Shenandoah Riverkeeper legislatively appointed to Stakeholder Advisory Committee
- Biennial Smallmouth Bass Assessment commences - biologists, fishing guides, regulators meet under one roof, through Shenandoah Riverkeeper leadership

LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

IN MARYLAND



Betsy Nicholas with lawmakers after great victory

A very significant success for equity for residents and the environment! Maryland General Assembly passed and Gov. Wes Moore signed the Maryland Coal Ash Accountability Act: Championed by Delegate Mary Lehman and Senator Michael Jackson who sponsored coal ash legislation in 2024, this bill codifies the federal EPA regulations from May 2024 that set effluent guidelines for coal ash in water and require the clean up of legacy sites. It also provides authority for Maryland to go beyond the federal regulations in monitoring, assessment and clean up, and requires a fee that will cover not only permitting personnel, which the current fee provides, but also additional personnel for health assessment, water quality monitoring, and oversight for clean up activities at these facilities. Additionally, the bill creates a coordination committee to ensure the impacted communities get a voice in the cleanup activities in their communities.

Unfortunately, however, two bills concerning PFAS failed as a result of industry opposition, which – at least this year – we were not able to overcome. One bill would have banned PFAS in pesticides, and the other would have regulated the application of PFAS-containing biosolids on farms. You can be absolutely certain that these measures will be high priorities for us in the next legislative session.

IN VIRGINIA

Our big win is the \$500,000 for the US Geological Survey's Harmful Algal Bloom Study in the Shenandoah. This budget amendment ensures continued funding for water quality monitoring activities, such as upkeep and maintenance of the equipment and the data collection and analysis of their findings. The original funding for this program expired at the end of 2024, but continued harmful algal blooms demonstrate the need for continued data collection and analysis.

In a difficult budget year for Virginia, none of the PFAS funding efforts was successful including the attempt to obtain funding for testing at the state laboratory as well as a bill that would have created a fund for residents using groundwater drinking wells to test the wells for PFAS contamination, something that PRKN supports as private wells are not covered under the EPA rules on PFAS (which have largely been withdrawn by the current administration).

On the positive side, PRKN was able to obtain passage of an amendment to a bill that would have allowed all academic institutions to land apply sewage sludge without a permit. Our amendment restricted the permit exemption to public universities, requiring them to largely comply with the land-application permit terms, but exempting them from the need to get a permit, over fears that permitting delays could risk loss of grant funding for research. We also added language that has this exemption expire in five years.



Brent frequently works with legislators for clean water

PROGRESS IN MUSSEL RESTORATION

And 50 Million Mussels continues! The generous support of an anonymous donor enables PRKN to fund two graduate students in 2026 to work on this program. Three cheers!

This great news follows the fulfilment of the Alexandria coal tar settlement which called for mussel seeding at Oronoco Bay – 39,000 new ones now call that place home.



Mussels – little gems at Oronoco Bay

HELPING YOUR SUPPORT DO ITS BEST WORK



Gala Auction Bidding – funding the future

Our Development Team is simply the best in the business – and frankly, it has to be. They make possible the funding needed to achieve the dramatic successes about which you read in these and other pages.

Our team of three combines both experience and youth, which brings new approaches. Together, they put the interests and needs of Potomac Riverkeeper Network first. Consequently, when you attend any of our events – the Gala, house parties, tabling opportunities – what you see is seamlessly orchestrated. That is the result of hours of thought and preparation.

Naturally, the past months have been ones of challenges. Deprivation of funding from federal sources had a greater indirect impact on us. Due to the crumbling of environmental oversight, we are filling in and doing more with the same funding we already had! However, through imaginative collaboration, we are working toward filling the gap. (Pause here to think about taking a moment to make a donation!)

As we get to the end of the calendar year, and the season of giving, try if possible to be as generous as you can. Clean water – for drinking, for recreation, and for our generations to come – rely on the work we do. And the work we do wouldn't be possible without your support!

From all of us – thank you!



Oxon Cove Cleanup check in – Reclaiming a vital community location



Tabling at DC Boat Show – Reaching hundreds of new friends



*Pretzels and A Pitcher Fundraiser
Putting the fun in fundraiser*



Some development staff



POTOMAC
RIVERKEEPER®
NETWORK

3070 M Street NW
Washington, DC 20007

Help us protect your right to clean water

As we reflect on 25 incredible years of fighting for cleaner rivers, we can't help feeling immense gratitude for your constant support. Despite the great strides we have made, there is still much to do to achieve swimmable, fishable, drinkable Potomac and Shenandoah rivers for all!

By making your end-of-year gift today, we can begin the next quarter of a century stronger, wiser, and full steam ahead.

Won't you please lend your support?

**Make sure to donate
by December 31, 2025
to double the impact
of your dollars!**



SCAN ME!

potomacriverkeepernetwork.org/eoy25

Your gift is tax-deductible if made by December 31st, 2025.